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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 003599

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NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/MARCHESE/HARDING  
STATE FOR NEA/ELA, NEA/FO:ATACHCO

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SUBJECT: LEBANON: RESORT TO DEMONSTRATIONS THREATENED AS  
THIRD ROUND OF CONSULTATIONS FAILS

Classified By: Jeffrey D. Feltman, Ambassador. Reason: 1.4 (d)

SUMMARY

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11. (S) Despite consistent reports of a positive atmosphere, the November 9 session of Parliament Speaker Berri's national consultations ended with no progress or compromise on the key issues. The group adjourned until November 11. Veteran insider Michel Murr conveyed to us on November 9 a grave warning that should Saad Hariri and Berri fail to reach a formula for implementing legislation to enact an international tribunal before the next session, there will be street demonstrations beginning Monday, November 13. According to our other interlocutors, the session failed over Murr's proposal to replace serving cabinet members including Charles Rizk with March 8 group appointees in an expanded cabinet of 26 members. In a statement to the press, Samir Ja'ja' seemed conciliatory toward Aoun but he seemed resigned that demonstrations would occur. Berri, meanwhile, put a brave face on the session's outcome and postponed his Iran trip to November 12 in order to conduct the next session. End Summary.

STALEMATE

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12. (C) The third session of national consultations held under the auspices of Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri concluded today with no progress, according to our contacts. Although there was agreement that the atmosphere had been more relaxed than in previous rounds, each side stuck firmly to its previous demands. The group decided to adjourn until Saturday, November 11, at 11:00 AM. The parties will spend the evening of November 9 and all day of November 10 in side talks and shuttle diplomacy aimed at resolving the impasse. To accommodate the extension of the talks, Berri has postponed his travel to Iran until November 12.

MURR PROPOSAL FAILS

-- AND THE STREET MAY BE NEAR

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13. (S) Metn MP Michel Murr told the Ambassador, after consulting with his son, Defense Minister and Deputy PM Elias Murr, that Berri and Mustaqbal Party leader Saad Hariri will meet November 9 and 10 to attempt to work out a deal to approve the special tribunal which will investigate and prosecute the assassination of Rafiq Hariri and related

crimes. If they can come up with a solution, Murr said, the November 11 session will be easier and more positive. If not, he claimed, "the street will start on Monday" -- i.e., November 13.

¶4. (C) MP Ily Skaiff told us that Murr's proposal for a cabinet of 26 ministers failed to gain March 14 acceptance because of Murr's insistence that Justice Minister Charles Rizk be ousted in favor of a March 8 member of Parliament. (Note: Murr had been instrumental in obtaining a cabinet post for Rizk in 2005. Since that time Rizk has moved away from his lifetime friend and patron, and Murr ally, Emile Lahoud. Meanwhile, Hariri and Druze leader Walid Jumblatt, impressed by Rizk's commitment to the creation of the tribunal, pledged to protect Rizk during the consultations. End note.) Berri tried to salvage the proposal by asking Murr to refrain from naming those who would be ousted from the cabinet and those who would be added to the cabinet; however Murr insisted on getting into specifics.

¶5. (C) Of all those with whom we spoke, MP Boutros Harb seemed the most positive about the proceedings, hailing the positive atmosphere. Harb characterized the meeting as a return to the National Dialogue of earlier this year, noting that the group had agreed to discuss all issues including the presidency, Hizballah's weapons, and the tribunal.

BERRI AND JA'JA' POSITIVE TO THE PRESS  
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¶6. (SBU) Berri, for his part, put a brave face on the proceedings in a press conference he held just after the meeting ended. He echoed the sentiments of others regarding

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atmospherics, indicating that it had been "the best so far" and that trust was built among the conferees.

¶7. (SBU) Lebanese Forces leader Samir Ja'ja' told the press following the meeting that he conceded that the cabinet needs to be altered, but gave a higher priority to changing the president, citing Lahoud's obstructionism as the reason for the GOL's failure to make progress on a number of issues. Ja'ja' accused the March 8 side of seeking a blocking minority; however he appeared conciliatory toward Free Patriotic Movement leader Michel Aoun. Ja'ja' stated that Aoun has the right to ask to participate in the government and characterized Aoun's request as realistic. When asked whether he would contend with March 8 in the street, Ja'ja' replied "I have no street" and said he saw no problem should March 8 supporters demonstrate, as long as they stick to the law.

FELTMAN